The Ballad of St. Barbara

G. K. Chesterton

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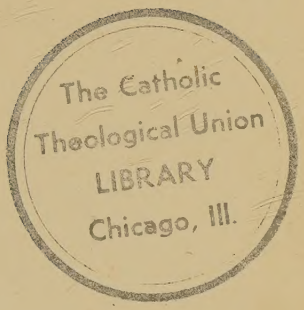

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The Ballad of St. Barbara

And Other Verses

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and Other Verses

By

Gilbert Keith Chesterton

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INTRODUCTION

TO THE AMERICAN EDITION

Objections have been raised against these verses but, strangely enough, not upon the simple and solid and self-evident ground that they are bad verses. So far as I follow the criticism, it is not so much a question of bad verse as of bad taste. And so far as I understand the test, it is regarded as bad taste for anybody to appear to be in any way enjoying himself, let alone his compositions. One excellent critic on an excellent paper reminded me gently that most people in the modern world are agnostics, and very sensitive in their feelings; and it seems that to use religious language in a loud voice in their presence is like disregarding the warning hush on the entrance to a sick-room. That the modern world is in many ways very like a sick-room I should be the last to deny; but I am not sure that

all the invalids need nothing but the sedative treatment. Another critic retorted upon me a remark I had made about Swinburne; and said that my statements were contradicted by the cheerfulness of the metre I employed. I do not altogether admit the parallel; for I think that my sentiments are almost as superior to Swinburne's sentiments as my verse is inferior to Swinburne's verse. But I do not think there is any contradiction between a cheerful metre and a combative meaning, even if there is between a cheerful metre and a pessimistic meaning; and none of my remarks are meant to have a pessimistic meaning. But I think it permissible to introduce this note upon the point; because it raises an issue much more interesting than this little book, or any book I am likely to write.

Nothing would induce me to say a word in defence of my poetry, even in the sense of seriously calling it poetry. But a man should always be ready to say a word for his philosophy; for if it is really a philosophy, it is not merely his. And to the gentleman who wished me to lower my voice lest the sensitive sceptic should overhear me, I think it only fair to confess that I have every hope

that he will. It seems to me a little unfair that liberty of opinion should take the form of somebody saying to me, "It is highly indecent that your religion should be still alive, when my religion has been dead for some time." I am quite ready to condole with him; but I cannot yet see that he has any right to complain of me. And to the critic who considered that verses of protest or denunciation should always be accompanied by a metre like a dirge, I must also express an apologetic incapacity to agree. I do not understand why any verse that suggests a battle must necessarily suggest a defeat. Even these few words would be an extravagant exaggeration of the importance of the subject, if the subject were merely the verses themselves. But it is at least connected in my mind with the most important subject in the world; and I merely wish to put it on record, as it were, in this paragraph, that all that has been most reviled as dismal and decayed superstition can at least produce something that is rebuked for vainglorious levity and vulgar high-spirits.

G. K. Chesterton.

TO F. C. IN MEMORIAM PALESTINE, '19

DO you remember one immortal
Lost moment out of time and space,
What time we thought, who passed the portal
Of that divine disastrous place
Where Life was slain and Truth was slandered
On that one holier hill than Rome,
How far abroad our bodies wandered
That evening when our souls came home?

The mystic city many-gated,
With monstrous columns, was your own:
Herodian stones fell down and waited
Two thousand years to be your throne.
In the grey rocks the burning blossom
Glowed terrible as the sacred blood:
It was no stranger to your bosom
Than bluebells of an English wood.

Do you remember a road that follows
The way of unforgotten feet,
Where from the waste of rocks and hollows
Climb up the crawling crooked street

▼

The stages of one towering drama
Always ahead and out of sight . . .
Do you remember Aceldama
And the jackal barking in the night?

Life is not void or stuff for scorners:
We have laughed loud and kept our love,
We have heard singers in tavern corners
And not forgotten the birds above:
We have known smiters and sons of thunder
And not unworthily walked with them,
We have grown wiser and lost not wonder;
And we have seen Jerusalem.

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THE BALLAD OF ST. BARBARA

THE BALLAD OF ST. BARBARA

(St. Barbara is the patron saint of artillery and of those in danger of sudden death.)

WHEN the long grey lines came flooding upon Paris in the plain,
We stood and drank of the last free air we never could taste again:
They had led us back from the lost battle, to halt we knew not where
And stilled us; and our gaping guns were dumb with our despair.
The grey tribes flowed for ever from the infinite lifeless lands
And a Norman to a Breton spoke, his chin upon his hands.

"There was an end of Ilium; and an end came to Rome;
And a man plays on a painted stage in the land that he calls home;
Arch after arch of triumph, but floor beyond falling floor,
That lead to a low door at last; and beyond there is no door."

And the Breton to the Norman spoke, like a small child spoke he,
And his sea-blue eyes were empty as his home beside the sea:
"There are more windows in one house than there are eyes to see,
There are more doors in a man's house, but God has hid the key:
Ruin is a builder of windows; her legend witnesseth
Barbara, the saint of gunners, and a stay in sudden death."

It seemed the wheel of the world stood still an instant in its turning,
More than the kings of the earth that turned with the turning of Valmy mill:
While trickled the idle tale and the sea-blue eyes were burning,
Still as the heart of a whirlwind the heart of the world stood still.

"Barbara the beautiful
Had praise of lute and pen:
Her hair was like a summer night
Dark and desired of men.

Her feet like birds from far away
That linger and light in doubt;
And her face was like a window
Where a man's first love looked out.

Her sire was master of many slaves
A hard man of his hands;
They built a tower about her
In the desolate golden lands,

Sealed as the tyrants sealed their tombs,
Planned with an ancient plan,
And set two windows in the tower
Like the two eyes of a man."

Our guns were set toward the foe; we had no word,
for firing.
Grey in the gateway of St. Gond the Guard of the
tyrant shone;
Dark with the fate of a falling star, retiring and
retiring,
The Breton line went backward and the Breton tale
went on.

"Her father had sailed across the sea
From the harbour of Africa
When all the slaves took up their tools
For the bidding of Barbara.

She smote the bare wall with her hand
And bad them smite again;
She poured them wealth of wine and meat
To stay them in their pain.

And cried through the lifted thunder
Of thronging hammer and hod
'Throw open the third window
In the third name of God.'

Then the hearts failed and the tools fell,
And far towards the foam,
Men saw a shadow on the sands
And her father coming home."

Speak low and low, along the line the whispered word is flying
Before the touch, before the time, we may not loose a breath:

Their guns must mash us to the mire and there be
no replying,
Till the hand is raised to fling us for the final dice
to death.

"There were two windows in your tower,
Barbara, Barbara,
For all between the sun and moon
In the lands of Africa.

Hath a man three eyes, Barbara,
A bird three wings,
That you have riven roof and wall
To look upon vain things?"

Her voice was like a wandering thing
That falters yet is free,
Whose soul has drunk in a distant land
Of the rivers of liberty.

"There are more wings than the wind knows
Or eyes than see the sun
In the light of the lost window
And the wind of the doors undone.

For out of the first lattice
Are the red lands that break
And out of the second lattice
Sea like a green snake,

But out of the third lattice
Under low eaves like wings
Is a new corner of the sky
And the other side of things."

It opened in the inmost place an instant beyond uttering,
A casement and a chasm and a thunder of doors undone,
A seraph's strong wing shaken out the shock of its unshuttering,
That split the shattered sunlight from a light behind the sun.

"Then he drew sword and drave her
Where the judges sat and said
'Caesar sits above the gods,
Barbara the maid.

Caesar hath made a treaty
With the moon and with the sun,
All the gods that men can praise
Praise him every one.

There is peace with the anointed
Of the scarlet oils of Bel,
With the Fish God, where the whirlpool
Is a winding stair to hell,

With the pathless pyramids of slime,
Where the mitred negro lifts
To his black cherub in the cloud
Abominable gifts,

With the leprous silver cities
Where the dumb priests dance and nod,
But not with the three windows
And the last name of God.'"

They are firing, we are falling, and the red skies
rend and shiver us,
Barbara, Barbara, we may not loose a breath—

Be at the bursting doors of doom, and in the dark
deliver us,
Who loosen the last window on the sun of sudden
death.

"Barbara the beautiful
Stood up as queen set free,
Whose mouth is set to a terrible cup
And the trumpet of liberty.

'I have looked forth from a window
That no man now shall bar,
Caesar's toppling battle-towers
Shall never stretch so far.

The slaves are dancing in their chains,
The child laughs at the rod,
Because of the bird of the three wings,
And the third face of God.'

The sword upon his shoulder
Shifted and shone and fell,
And Barbara lay very small
And crumpled like a shell."

What wall upon what hinges turned stands open
like a door?
Too simple for the sight of faith, too huge for
human eyes,
What light upon what ancient way shines to a
far-off floor,
The line of the lost land of France or the plains of
Paradise?

"Caesar smiled above the gods,
His lip of stone was curled,
His iron armies wound like chains
Round and round the world,

And the strong slayer of his own
That cut down flesh for grass,
Smiled too, and went to his own tower
Like a walking tower of brass,

And the songs ceased and the slaves were
dumb;
And far towards the foam
Men saw a shadow on the sands;
And her father coming home. . . .

Blood of his blood upon the sword
Stood red but never dry.
He wiped it slowly, till the blade
Was blue as the blue sky.

But the blue sky split with a thunder-crack,
Spat down a blinding brand,
And all of him lay back and flat
As his shadow on the sand."

The touch and the tornado; all our guns give tongue together
St. Barbara for the gunnery and God defend the right,
They are stopped and gapped and battered as we blast away the weather.
Building window upon window to our lady of the light.
For the light is come on Liberty, her foes are falling, falling,
They are reeling, they are running, as the shameful years have run,
She is risen for all the humble, she has heard the conquered calling,

St. Barbara of the Gunners, with her hand upon
the gun.
They are burst asunder in the midst that eat of
their own flatteries,
Whose lip is curled to order as its barbered hair is
curled. . . .
Blast of the beauty of sudden death, St. Barbara of
the batteries!
That blow the new white window in the wall of all
the world.

For the hand is raised behind us, and the bolt
smites hard
Through the rending of the doorways, through the
death-gap of the Guard,
For the cry of the Three Colours is in Condé and
beyond
And the Guard is flung for carrion in the graveyard
of St. Gond,
Through Mondemont and out of it, through Morin
marsh and on
With earthquake of salutation the impossible thing
is gone,
Gaul, charioted and charging, great Gaul upon a
gun,

Tip-toe on all her thousand years and trumpeting
to the sun:
As day returns, as death returns, swung backwards
and swung home,
Back on the barbarous reign returns the battering-
ram of Rome.
While that that the east held hard and hot like
pincers in a forge,
Came like the west wind roaring up the cannon of
St. George,
Where the hunt is up and racing over stream and
swamp and tarn
And their batteries, black with battle, hold the
bridgeheads of the Marne
And across the carnage of the Guard, by Paris in
the plain,
The Normans to the Bretons cried and the Bretons
cheered again. . . .
But he that told the tale went home to his house
beside the sea
And burned before St. Barbara, the light of the
windows three,
Three candles for an unknown thing, never to come
again,
That opened like the eye of God on Paris in the plain.

ELEGY IN A COUNTRY CHURCH-YARD

THE men that worked for England
They have their graves at home:
And bees and birds of England
About the cross can roam.

But they that fought for England,
Following a falling star,
Alas, alas for England
They have their graves afar.

And they that rule in England,
In stately conclave met,
Alas, alas for England
They have no graves as yet.

THE SWORD OF SURPRISE

SUNDER me from my bones, O sword of God,
Till they stand stark and strange as do the trees;
That I whose heart goes up with the soaring woods
May marvel as much at these.

Sunder me from my blood that in the dark
I hear that red ancestral river run,
Like branching buried floods that find the sea
But never see the sun.

Give me miraculous eyes to see my eyes,
Those rolling mirrors made alive in me,
Terrible crystal more incredible
Than all the things they see.

Sunder me from my soul, that I may see
The sins like streaming wounds, the life's brave beat;
Till I shall save myself, as I would save
A stranger in the street.

A WEDDING IN WAR-TIME

OUR God who made two lovers in a garden,
And smote them separate and set them free,
Their four eyes wild for wonder and wrath
and pardon
And their kiss thunder as lips of land and sea:
Each rapt unendingly beyond the other,
Two starry worlds of unknown gods at war,
Wife and not mate, a man and not a brother,
We thank thee thou hast made us what we are.

Make not the grey slime of infinity
To swamp these flowers thou madest one by one;
Let not the night that was thine enemy
Mix a mad twilight of the moon and sun;
Waken again to thunderclap and clamour
The wonder of our sundering and the song,
Or break our hearts with thine hell-shattering
hammer
But leave a shade between us all day long.

Shade of high shame and honourable blindness
When youth, in storm of dizzy and distant things,
Finds the wild windfall of a little kindness
And shakes to think that all the world has wings.

When the one head that turns the heavens in turning
Moves yet as lightly as a lingering bird,
And red and random, blown astray but burning,
Like a lost spark goes by the glorious word.

Make not this sex, this other side of things,
A thing less distant than the world's desire;
What colour to the end of evening clings
And what far cry of frontiers and what fire
Fallen too far beyond the sun for seeking,
Let it divide us though our kingdom come;
With a far signal in our secret speaking
To hang the proud horizon in our home.

Once we were one, a shapeless cloud that lingers
Loading the seas and shutting out the skies,
One with the woods, a monster of myriad fingers,
You laid on me no finger of surprise.
One with the stars, a god with myriad eyes,
I saw you nowhere and was blind for scorn:
One till the world was riven and the rise
Of the white days when you and I were born.

Darkens the world: the world-old fetters rattle;
And these that have no hope behind the sun

May feed like bondmen and may breed like cattle,
One in the darkness as the dead are one;
Us if the rended grave give up its glory
Trumpets shall summon asunder and face to face:
We will be strangers in so strange a story
And wonder, meeting in so wild a place.

Ah, not in vain or utterly for loss
Come even the black flag and the battle-hordes,
If these grey devils flee the sign of the cross
Even in the symbol of the crossing swords.
Nor shall death doubt Who made our souls alive
Swords meeting and not stakes set side by side,
Bade us in the sunburst and the thunder thrive
Earthquake and Dawn; the bridegroom and the
bride.

Death and not dreams or doubt of things undying,
Of whose the holy hearth or whose the sword;
Though sacred spirits dissever in strong crying
Into Thy hands, but Thy two hands, O Lord,
Though not in Earth as once in Eden standing
So plain again we see Thee what thou art,
As in this blaze, the blasting and the branding
Of this wild wedding where we meet and part.

THE MYSTERY

IF sunset clouds could grow on trees
It would but match the may in flower;
And skies be underneath the seas
No topsyturvier than a shower.

If mountains rose on wings to wander
They were no wilder than a cloud;
Yet all my praise is mean as slander,
Mean as these mean words spoken aloud.

And never more than now I know
That man's first heaven is far behind;
Unless the blazing seraph's blow
Has left him in the garden blind.

Witness, O Sun that blinds our eyes,
Unthinkable and unthankable King,
That though all other wonder dies
I wonder at not wondering.

"THE MYTH OF ARTHUR"

O LEARNED man who never learned to learn,
Save to deduce, by timid steps and small,
From towering smoke that fire can never burn
And from tall tales that men were never tall.
Say, have you thought what manner of man it is
Of whom men say "He could strike giants down"?
Or what strong memories over time's abyss
Bore up the pomp of Camelot and the crown.
And why one banner all the background fills,
Beyond the pageants of so many spears,
And by what witchery in the western hills
A throne stands empty for a thousand years.
Who hold, unheeding this immense impact,
Immortal story for a mortal sin;
Lest human fable touch historic fact,
Chase myths like moths, and fight them with a pin.
Take comfort; rest—there needs not this ado.
You shall not be a myth, I promise you.

THE OLD SONG

(On the Embankment in stormy weather.)

A LIVID sky on London
And like iron steeds that rear
A shock of engines halted,
And I knew the end was near:
And something said that far away, over the hills and far away,
There came a crawling thunder and the end of all things here.
For London Bridge is broken down, broken down, broken down,
As digging lets the daylight on the sunken streets of yore,
The lightning looked on London town, the broken bridge of London town,
The ending of a broken road where men shall go no more.

I saw the kings of London town,
The kings that buy and sell,
That built it up with penny loaves
And penny lies as well:

And where the streets were paved with gold, the shrivelled paper shone for gold,
The scorching light of promises that pave the streets of hell.
For penny loaves will melt away, melt away, melt away,
Mock the mean that haggled in the grain they did not grow;
With hungry faces in the gate, a hundred thousand in the gate,
A thunder-flash on London and the finding of the foe.

I heard the hundred pin-makers
Slow down their racking din,
Till in the stillness men could hear
The dropping of the pin:
And somewhere men without the wall, beneath the wood, without the wall,
Had found the place where London ends and England can begin.
For pins and needles bend and break, bend and break, bend and break,
Faster than the breaking spears or the bending of the bow

Of pageants pale in thunder-light, 'twixt thunder-load and thunder-light,
The Hundreds marching on the hills in the wars of long ago.

I saw great Cobbett riding,
The horseman of the shires;
And his face was red with judgment
And a light of Luddite fires:
And south to Sussex and the sea the lights leapt up for liberty,
The trumpet of the yeomanry, the hammer of the squires;
For bars of iron rust away, rust away, rust away,
Rend before the hammer and the horseman riding in,
Crying that all men at the last, and at the worst and at the last,
Have found the place where England ends and England can begin.

His horse-hoofs go before you,
Far beyond your bursting tyres;
And time is bridged behind him
And our sons are with our sires.

A trailing meteor on the Downs he rides above the rotting towns,
The Horseman of Apocalypse, the Rider of the Shires.
For London Bridge is broken down, broken down, broken down;
Blow the horn of Huntingdon from Scotland to the sea—
. . . Only a flash of thunder-light, a flying dream of thunder-light,
Had shown under the shattered sky a people that were free.

THE TRINKETS

A WANDERING world of rivers,
A wavering world of trees,
If the world grow dim and dizzy
With all changes and degrees,
It is but Our Lady's mirror
Hung dreaming in its place,
Shining with only shadows
Till she wakes it with her face.

The standing whirlpool of the stars,
The wheel of all the world,
Is a ring on Our Lady's finger
With the suns and moons empearled
With stars for stones to please her
Who sits playing with her rings
With the great heart that a woman has
And the love of little things.

Wings of the whirlwind of the world
From here to Ispahan,
Spurning the flying forests
Are light as Our Lady's fan:

For all things violent here and vain
Lie open and all at ease
Where God has girded heaven to guard
Her holy vanities.

THE PHILANTHROPIST

(With apologies to a beautiful poem.)

ABOU BEN ADHEM (may his tribe decrease
By cautious birth-control and die in peace)
Mellow with learning lightly took the word
That marked him not with them that love the Lord,
And told the angel of the book and pen
"Write me as one that loves his fellow-men:
For them alone I labour; to reclaim
The ragged roaming Bedouin and to tame
To ordered service; to uproot their vine
Who mock the Prophet, being mad with wine,
Let daylight through their tents and through their lives,
Number their camels, even count their wives,
Plot out the desert into streets and squares;
And count it a more fruitful work than theirs
Who lift a vain and visionary love
To your vague Allah in the skies above."

Gently replied the angel of the pen:
"Labour in peace and love your fellow-men:
And love not God, since men alone are dear,
Only fear God; for you have cause to fear."

ON THE DOWNS

WHEN you came over the top of the world
In the great day on the Downs,
The air was crisp and the clouds were curled,
When you came over the top of the world,
And under your feet were spire and street
And seven English towns.

And I could not think that the pride was perished
As you came over the down;
Liberty, chivalry, all we cherished,
Lost in a rattle of pelf and perished;
Or the land we love that you walked above
Withering town by town.

For you came out on the dome of the earth
Like a vision of victory,
Out on the great green dome of the earth
As the great blue dome of the sky for girth,
And under your feet the shires could meet
And your eyes went out to sea.

Under your feet the towns were seven,
Alive and alone on high,

Your back to the broad white wall of heaven;
You were one and the towns were seven,
Single and one as the soaring sun
And your head upheld the sky.

And I thought of a thundering flag unfurled
And the roar of the burghers' bell:
Beacons crackled and bolts were hurled
As you came over the top of the world;
And under your feet were chance and cheat
And the slime of the slopes of hell.

It has not been as the great wind spoke
On the great green down that day:
We have seen, wherever the wide wind spoke,
Slavery slaying the English folk:
The robbers of land we have seen command
The rulers of land obey.

We have seen the gigantic golden worms
In the garden of paradise:
We have seen the great and the wise make terms
With the peace of snakes and the pride of worms,
And them that plant make covenant
With the locust and the lice.

And the wind blows and the world goes on
And the world can say that we,
Who stood on the cliffs where the quarries shone,
Stood upon clouds that the sun shone on:
And the clouds dissunder and drown in thunder
The news that will never be.

Lady of all that have loved the people,
Light over roads astray,
Maze of steading and street and steeple,
Great as a heart that has loved the people:
Stand on the crown of the soaring down,
Lift up your arms and pray.

Only you I have not forgotten
For wreck of the world's renown,
Rending and ending of things gone rotten,
Only the face of you unforgotten:
And your head upthrown in the skies alone
As you came over the down.

THE RED SEA

OUR souls shall be Leviathans
In purple seas of wine
When drunkenness is dead with death,
And drink is all divine;
Learning in those immortal vats
What mortal vineyards mean;
For only in heaven we shall know
How happy we have been.

Like clouds that wallow in the wind
Be free to drift and drink;
Tower without insolence when we rise,
Without surrender sink:
Dreams dizzy and crazy we shall know
And have no need to write
Our blameless blasphemies of praise,
Our nightmares of delight.

For so in such misshapen shape
The vision came to me,
Where such titanian dolphins dark
Roll in a sunset sea:
Dark with dense colours, strange and strong

As terrible true love,
Haloed like fish in phospher light
The holy monsters move.

Measure is here and law, to learn,
When honour rules it so,
To lift the glass and lay it down
Or break the glass and go.
But when the world's New Deluge boils
From the New Noah's vine,
Our souls shall be Leviathans
In sanguine seas of wine.

FOR A WAR MEMORIAL

(Suggested Inscription probably not selected by the Committee.)

THE hucksters haggle in the mart
The cars and carts go by;
Senates and schools go droning on;
For dead things cannot die.

A storm stooped on the place of tombs
With bolts to blast and rive;
But these be names of many men
The lightning found alive.

If usurers rule and rights decay
And visions view once more
Great Carthage like a golden shell
Gape hollow on the shore,

Still to the last of crumbling time
Upon this stone be read
How many men of England died
To prove they were not dead.

MEMORY

IF I ever go back to Baltimore,
The city of Maryland,
I shall miss again as I missed before
A thousand things of the world in store,
The story standing in every door
That beckons with every hand.

I shall not know where the bonds were riven
And a hundred faiths set free,
Where a wandering cavalier had given
Her hundredth name to the Queen of Heaven,
And made oblation of feuds forgiven
To Our Lady of Liberty.

I shall not travel the tracks of fame
Where the war was not to the strong;
When Lee the last of the heroes came
With the Men of the South and a flag like flame,
And called the land by its lovely name
In the unforgotten song.

If ever I cross the sea and stray
To the city of Maryland,

I will sit on a stone and watch or pray
For a stranger's child that was there one day:
And the child will never come back to play,
And no one will understand.

THE ENGLISH GRAVES

WERE I that wandering citizen whose city
is the world,
I would not weep for all that fell before
the flags were furled;
I would not let one murmur mar the trumpets
volleying forth
How God grew weary of the kings, and the cold
hell in the north.
But we whose hearts are homing birds have heavier
thoughts of home,
Though the great eagles burn with gold on Paris or
on Rome,
Who stand beside our dead and stare, like seers at
an eclipse,
At the riddle of the island tale and the twilight of
the ships.

For these were simple men that loved with hands
and feet and eyes,
Whose souls were humbled to the hills and
narrowed to the skies,
The hundred little lands within one little land that
lie,

Where Severn seeks the sunset isles or Sussex
scales the sky.

And what is theirs, though banners blow on
Warsaw risen again,
Or ancient laughter walks in gold through the
vineyards of Lorraine,
Their dead are marked on English stones, their
loves on English trees,
How little is the prize they win, how mean a coin
for these—
How small a shrivelled laurel-leaf lies crumpled
here and curled:
They died to save their country and they only
saved the world.

NIGHTMARE

THE silver and violet leopard of the night
Spotted with stars and smooth with silence sprang;
And though three doors stood open, the end of light
Closed like a trap; and stillness was a clang.

Under the leopard sky of lurid stars
I strove with evil sleep the hot night long,
Dreams dumb and swollen of triumphs without wars,
Oh tongueless trumpet and unanswering gong.

I saw a pale imperial pomp go by,
Helmet and hornèd mitre and heavy wreath;
Their high strange ensigns hung upon the sky
And their great shields were like the doors of death.

Their mitres were as moving pyramids
And all their crowns as marching towers were tall;
Their eyes were cold under their carven lids
And the same carven smile was on them all.

Over a paven plain that seemed unending
They passed unfaltering till it found an end
In one long shallow step; and these descending
Fared forth anew as long away to wend.

I thought they travelled for a thousand years;
And at the end was nothing for them all,
For all that splendour of sceptres and of spears,
But a new step, another easy fall.

The smile of stone seemed but a little less,
The load of silver but a little more:
And ever was that terraced wilderness
And falling plain paved like a palace floor.

Rust red as gore crawled on their arms of might
And on their faces wrinkles and not scars:
Till the dream suddenly ended; noise and light
Loosened the tyranny of the tropic stars.

But over them like a subterranean sun
I saw the sign of all the fiends that fell;
And a wild voice cried "Hasten and be done,
Is there no steepness in the stairs of hell?"

He that returns, He that remains the same,
Turned the round real world, His iron vice;
Down the grey garden paths a bird called twice,
And through three doors mysterious daylight came.

A SECOND CHILDHOOD

WHEN all my days are ending
And I have no song to sing,
I think I shall not be too old
To stare at everything;
As I stared once at a nursery door
Or a tall tree and a swing.

Wherein God's ponderous mercy hangs
On all my sins and me,
Because He does not take away
The terror from the tree
And stones still shine along the road
That are and cannot be.

Men grow too old for love, my love,
Men grow too old for wine,
But I shall not grow too old to see
Unearthly daylight shine,
Changing my chamber's dust to snow
Till I doubt if it be mine.

Behold, the crowning mercies melt,
The first surprises stay;

And in my dross is dropped a gift
For which I dare not pray:
That a man grow used to grief and joy
But not to night and day.

Men grow too old for love, my love,
Men grow too old for lies;
But I shall not grow too old to see
Enormous night arise,
A cloud that is larger than the world
And a monster made of eyes.

Nor am I worthy to unloose
The latchet of my shoe;
Or shake the dust from off my feet
Or the staff that bears me through
On ground that is too good to last,
Too solid to be true.

Men grow too old to woo, my love,
Men grow too old to wed:
But I shall not grow too old to see
Hung crazily overhead
Incredible rafters when I wake
And find I am not dead.

A thrill of thunder in my hair:
Though blackening clouds be plain,
Still I am stung and startled
By the first drop of the rain:
Romance and pride and passion pass
And these are what remain.

Strange crawling carpets of the grass,
Wide windows of the sky:
So in this perilous grace of God
With all my sins go I:
And things grow new though I grow old,
Though I grow old and die.

"MEDIÆVALISM"

IF men should rise and return to the noise and time of the tourney,
The name and fame of the tabard, the tangle of gules and gold,
Would these things stand and suffice for the bourne of a backward journey,
A light on our days returning, as it was in the days of old?

Nay, there is none rides back to pick up a glove or a feather,
Though the gauntlet rang with honour or the plume was more than a crown:
And hushed is the holy trumpet that called the nations together
And under the Horns of Hattin the hope of the world went down.

Ah, not in remembrance stored, but out of oblivion starting,
Because you have sought new homes and all that you sought is so,

Because you had trodden the fire and barred the door in departing,
Returns in your chosen exile the glory of long ago.

Not then when you barred the door, not then when you trod the embers,
But now, at your new road's end, you have seen the face of a fate,
That not as a child looks back, and not as a fool remembers,
All that men took too lightly and all that they love too late.

It is you that have made no rubric for saints, no raiment for lovers,
Your caps that cry for a feather, your roofs that sigh for a spire:
Is it a dream from the dead if your own decay discovers
Alive in your rotting graveyard the worm of the world's desire?

Therefore the old trees tower, that the green trees grow and are stunted:

Therefore these dead men mock you, that you the
living are dead:
Since ever you battered the saints and the tools of
your crafts were blunted,
Or shattered the glass in its glory and loaded your-
selves with the lead.

When the usurer hunts the squire as the squire has
hunted the peasant,
As sheep that are eaten of worms where men were
eaten of sheep:
Now is the judgment of earth, and the weighing of
past and present,
Who scorn to weep over ruins, behold your ruin
and weep.

Have ye not known, ye fools, that have made the
present a prison,
That thirst can remember water and hunger
remember bread?
We went not gathering ghosts; but the shriek of
your shame is arisen
Out of your own black Babel too loud; and it woke
the dead.

POLAND

AUGURS that watched archaic birds
Such plumèd prodigies might read,
The eagles that were double-faced,
The eagle that was black indeed;
And when the battle-birds went down
And in their track the vultures come,
We know what pardon and what peace
Will keep our little masters dumb.

The men that sell what others make,
As vultures eat what others slay,
Will prove in matching plume with plume
That naught is black and all is grey;
Grey as those dingy doves that once,
By money-changers palmed and priced,
Amid the crash of tables flapped
And huddled from the wrath of Christ.

But raised for ever for a sign
Since God made anger glorious,
Where eagles black and vultures grey
Flocked back about the heroic house,

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Where war is holier than peace,
Where hate is holier than love,
Shone terrible as the Holy Ghost
An eagle whiter than a dove.

THE HUNTING OF THE DRAGON

WHEN we went hunting the Dragon
In the days when we were young,
We tossed the bright world over our shoulder
As bugle and baldrick slung;
Never was world so wild and fair
As what went by on the wind,
Never such fields of paradise
As the fields we left behind:
For this is the best of a rest for men
That men should rise and ride
Making a flying fairyland
Of market and country-side,
Wings on the cottage, wings on the wood,
Wings upon pot and pan,
For the hunting of the Dragon
That is the life of a man.

For men grow weary of fairyland
When the Dragon is a dream,
And tire of the talking bird in the tree,
The singing fish in the stream;
And the wandering stars grow stale, grow stale,

And the wonder is stiff with scorn;
For this is the honour of fairyland
And the following of the horn;

Beauty on beauty called us back
When we could rise and ride,
And a woman looked out of every window
As wonderful as a bride:
And the tavern-sign as a tabard blazed,
And the children cheered and ran,
For the love of the hate of the Dragon
That is the pride of a man.

The sages called him a shadow
And the light went out of the sun:
And the wise men told us that all was well
And all was weary and one:
And then, and then, in the quiet garden,
With never a weed to kill,
We knew that his shining tail had shone
In the white road over the hill:
We knew that the clouds were flakes of flame,
We knew that the sunset fire
Was red with the blood of the Dragon
Whose death is the world's desire.

For the horn was blown in the heart of the night
That men should rise and ride,
Keeping the tryst of a terrible jest
Never for long untried;
Drinking a dreadful blood for wine,
Never in cup or can,
The death of a deathless Dragon,
That is the life of a man.

SONNET

HIGH on the wall that holds Jerusalem
I saw one stand under the stars like stone.
And when I perish it shall not be known
Whether he lived, some strolling son of Shem,
Or was some great ghost wearing the diadem
Of Solomon or Saladin on a throne:
I only know, the features being unshown,
I did not dare draw near and look on them.

Did ye not guess . . . the diadem might be
Plaited in stranger style by hands of hate . . .
But when I looked, the wall was desolate
And the grey starlight powdered tower and tree:
And vast and vague beyond the Golden Gate
Heaved Moab of the mountains like a sea.

FANTASIA

THE happy men that lose their heads
They find their heads in heaven,
As cherub heads with cherub wings,
And cherub haloes even:
Out of the infinite evening lands
Along the sunset sea,
Leaving the purple fields behind,
The cherub wings beat down the wind
Back to the groping body and blind
As the bird back to the tree.

Whether the plumes be passion-red
For him that truly dies
By headsmen's blade or battle-axe,
Or blue like butterflies,
For him that lost it in a lane
In April's fits and starts,
His folly is forgiven then:
But higher, and far beyond our ken,
Is the healing of the unhappy men,
The men that lost their hearts.

Is there not pardon for the brave
And broad release above,

Who lost their heads for liberty
Or lost their hearts for love?
Or is the wise man wise indeed
Whom larger thoughts keep whole?
Who sees life equal like a chart,
Made strong to play the saner part,
And keep his head and keep his heart,
And only lose his soul.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

(The Chief Constable has issued a statement declaring that carol singing in the streets by children is illegal, and morally and physically injurious. He appeals to the public to discourage the practice.—Daily Paper.)

GOD rest you merry gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay;
The Herald Angels cannot sing,
The cops arrest them on the wing,
And warn them of the docketing
Of anything they say.

God rest you merry gentlemen,
May nothing you dismay:
On your reposeful cities lie
Deep silence, broken only by
The motor horn's melodious cry,
The hooter's happy bray.

So, when the song of children ceased
And Herod was obeyed,

In his high hall Corinthian
With purple and with peacock fan,
Rested that merry gentleman;
And nothing him dismayed.

TO CAPTAIN FRYATT

TRAMPLED yet red is the last of the embers,
Red the last cloud of a sun that has set;
What of your sleeping though Flanders remembers,
What of your waking, if England forget?

Why should you share in the hearts that we harden,
In the shame of our nature, who see it and live?
How more than the godly the greedy can pardon,
How well and how quickly the hungry forgive.

Ah, well if the soil of the stranger had wrapped you,
While the lords that you served and the friends that you knew
Hawk in the marts of the tyrants that trapped you,
Tout in the shops of the butchers that slew.

Why should you wake for a realm that is rotten,
Stuffed with their bribes and as dead to their debts?
Sleep and forget us, as we have forgotten;
For Flanders remembers and England forgets.

FOR FOUR GUILDS:

I. The Glass-Stainers

TO every Man his Mystery,
A trade and only one:
The masons make the hives of men,
The domes of grey or dun,
But we have wrought in rose and gold
The houses of the sun.

The shipwrights build the houses high,
Whose green foundations sway
Alive with fish like little flames,
When the wind goes out to slay.
But we abide with painted sails
The cyclone of the day.

The weavers make the clothes of men
And coats for everyone;
They walk the streets like sunset clouds;
But we have woven and spun
In scarlet or in golden-green
The gay coats of the sun.

You whom the usurers and the lords
With insolent liveries trod,
Deep in dark church behold, above
Their lance-lengths by a rod,
Where we have blazed the tabard
Of the trumpeter of God.

FOR FOUR GUILDS:

II. The Bridge-Builders

IN the world's whitest morning
As hoary with hope,
The Builder of Bridges
Was priest and was pope:
And the mitre of mystery
And the canopy his,
Who darkened the chasms
And domed the abyss.

To eastward and westward
Spread wings at his word
The arch with the key-stone
That stoops like a bird;
That rides the wild air
And the daylight cast under;
The highway of danger,
The gateway of wonder.

Of his throne were the thunders
That rivet and fix
Wild weddings of strangers
That meet and not mix;

The town and the cornland;
The bride and the groom:
In the breaking of bridges
Is treason and doom.

But he bade us, who fashion
The road that can fly,
That we build not too heavy
And build not too high:
Seeing alway that under
The dark arch's bend
Shine death and white daylight
Unchanged to the end.

Who walk on his mercy
Walk light, as he saith,
Seeing that our life
Is a bridge above death;
And the world and its gardens
And hills, as ye heard,
Are born above space
On the wings of a bird.

Not high and not heavy
Is building of his:

When ye seal up the flood
And forget the abyss,
When your towers are uplifted,
Your banners unfurled,
In the breaking of bridges
Is the end of the world.

FOR FOUR GUILDS:

III. The Stone-Masons

WE have graven the mountain of God with hands,
As our hands were graven of God, they say,
Where the seraphs burn in the sun like brands
And the devils carry the rains away;
Making a thrift of the throats of hell,
Our gargoyles gather the roaring rain,
Whose yawn is more than a frozen yell
And their very vomiting not in vain.

Wilder than all that a tongue can utter,
Wiser than all that is told in words,
The wings of stone of the soaring gutter
Fly out and follow the flight of the birds;
The rush and rout of the angel wars
Stand out above the astounded street,
Where we flung our gutters against the stars
For a sign that the first and the last shall meet.

We have graven the forest of heaven with hands,
Being great with a mirth too gross for pride,

In the stone that battered him Stephen stands
And Peter himself is petrified:
Such hands as have grubbed in the glebe for bread
Have bidden the blank rock blossom and thrive,
Such hands as have stricken a live man dead
Have struck, and stricken the dead alive.

Fold your hands before heaven in praying,
Lift up your hands into heaven and cry;
But look where our dizziest spires are saying
What the hands of a man did up in the sky:
Drenched before you have heard the thunder,
White before you have felt the snow;
For the giants lift up their hands to wonder
How high the hands of a man could go.

FOR FOUR GUILDS:

IV. The Bell-Ringers

THE angels are singing like birds in a tree
In the organ of good St. Cecily:
And the parson reads with his hand upon
The graven eagle of great St. John:
But never the fluted pipes shall go
Like the fifes of an army all a-row,
Merrily marching down the street
To the marts where the busy and idle meet;
And never the brazen bird shall fly
Out of the window and into the sky,
Till men in cities and shires and ships
Look up at the living Apocalypse.

But all can hark at the dark of even
The bells that bay like the hounds of heaven,
Tolling and telling that over and under,
In the ways of the air like a wandering thunder,
The hunt is up over hills untrod:
For the wind is the way of the dogs of God:
From the tyrant's tower to the outlaw's den
Hunting the souls of the sons of men.
Ruler and robber and pedlar and peer,

Who will not harken and yet will hear;
Filling men's heads with the hurry and hum
Making them welcome before they come.

And we poor men stand under the steeple
Drawing the cords that can draw the people,
And in our leash like the leaping dogs
Are God's most deafening demagogues:
And we are but little, like dwarfs underground,
While hang up in heaven the houses of sound,
Moving like mountains that faith sets free,
Yawning like caverns that roar with the sea,
As awfully loaded, as airly buoyed,
Armoured archangels that trample the void:
Wild as with dancing and weighty with dooms,
Heavy as their panoply, light as their plumes.

Neither preacher nor priest are we:
Each man mount to his own degree:
Only remember that just such a cord
Tosses in heaven the trumpet and sword;
Souls on their terraces, saints on their towers,
Rise up in arms at alarum like ours:
Glow like great watchfires that redden the skies
Titans whose wings are a glory of eyes,

Crowned constellations by twelves and by sevens,
Domed dominations more old than the heavens,
Virtues that thunder and thrones that endure
Sway like a bell to the prayers of the poor.

THE CONVERT

AFTER one moment when I bowed my head
And the whole world turned over and came upright,
And I came out where the old road shone white,
I walked the ways and heard what all men said,
Forests of tongues, like autumn leaves unshed,
Being not unlovable but strange and light;
Old riddles and new creeds, nor in despite
But softly, as men smile about the dead.

The sages have a hundred maps to give
That trace their crawling cosmos like a tree,
They rattle reason out through many a sieve
That stores the sand and lets the gold go free:
And all these things are less than dust to me
Because my name is Lazarus and I live.

SONGS OF EDUCATION

SONGS OF EDUCATION:

I. History

Form 991785, *Sub-Section D*

THE Roman threw us a road, a road,
And sighed and strolled away:
The Saxon gave us a raid, a raid,
A raid that came to stay;
The Dane went west, but the Dane confessed
That he went a bit too far;
And we all became, by another name,
The Imperial race we are.

Chorus

The Imperial race, the inscrutable race,
The invincible race we are.

Though Sussex hills are bare, are bare,
And Sussex weald is wide,
From Chichester to Chester
Men saw the Norman ride;
He threw his sword in the air and sang
To a sort of a light guitar;
It was all the same, for we all became
The identical nobs we are.

Chorus

The identical nobs, individual nobs
Unmistakable nobs we are.

The people lived on the land, the land,
They pottered about and prayed;
They built a cathedral here and there
Or went on a small crusade:
Till the bones of Becket were bundled out
For the fun of a fat White Czar,
And we all became, in spoil and flame,
The intelligent lot we are.

Chorus

The intelligent lot, the intuitive lot,
The infallible lot we are.

O Warwick woods are green, are green,
But Warwick trees can fall:
And Birmingham grew so big, so big,
And Stratford stayed so small.
Till the hooter howled to the morning lark
That sang to the morning star;
And we all became, in freedom's name,
The fortunate chaps we are.

Chorus

The fortunate chaps, felicitous chaps,
The fairy-like chaps we are.

The people they left the land, the land,
But they went on working hard;
And the village green that had got mislaid
Turned up in the squire's back-yard:
But twenty men of us all got work
On a bit of his motor car;
And we all became, with the world's acclaim,
The marvellous mugs we are.

Chorus

The marvellous mugs, miraculous mugs,
The mystical mugs we are.

SONGS OF EDUCATION:

II. Geography

Form 17955301, *Sub-Section Z*

THE earth is a place on which England is found,
And you find it however you twirl the globe round;
For the spots are all red and the rest is all grey,
And that is the meaning of Empire Day.

Gibraltar's a rock that you see very plain,
And attached to its base is the district of Spain.
And the island of Malta is marked further on,
Where some natives were known as the Knights of St. John.
Then Cyprus, and east to the Suez Canal,
That was conquered by Dizzy and Rothschild his pal
With the Sword of the Lord in the old English way;
And that is the meaning of Empire Day.

Our principal imports come far as Cape Horn;
For necessities, cocoa; for luxuries, corn;
Thus Brahmins are born for the rice-field, and thus,

The Gods made the Greeks to grow currants for us;
Of earth's other tributes are plenty to choose,
Tobacco and petrol and Jazzing and Jews:
The Jazzing will pass but the Jews they will stay;
And that is the meaning of Empire Day.

Our principal exports, all labelled and packed,
At the ends of the earth are delivered intact:
Our soap or our salmon can travel in tins
Between the two poles and as like as two pins;
So that Lancashire merchants whenever they like
Can water the beer of a man in Klondike
Or poison the meat of a man in Bombay;
And that is the meaning of Empire Day.

The day of St. George is a musty affair
Which Russians and Greeks are permitted to share;
The day of Trafalgar is Spanish in name
And the Spaniards refuse to pronounce it the same;
But the Day of the Empire from Canada came
With Morden and Borden and Beaverbrook's fame
And saintly seraphical souls such as they:
And that is the meaning of Empire Day.

SONGS OF EDUCATION:

III. For the Crêche

Form 8277059, *Sub-Section K*

I REMEMBER my mother, the day that we
met,
A thing I shall never entirely forget;
And I toy with the fancy that, young as I am,
I should know her again if we met in a tram.
But mother is happy in turning a crank
That increases the balance at somebody's bank;
And I feel satisfaction that mother is free
From the sinister task of attending to me.

They have brightened our room, that is spacious
and cool,
With diagrams used in the Idiot School,
And Books for the Blind that will teach us to see;
But mother is happy, for mother is free.
For mother is dancing up forty-eight floors,
For love of the Leeds International Stores,
And the flame of that faith might perhaps have
grown cold,
With the care of a baby of seven weeks old.

For mother is happy in greasing a wheel
For somebody else, who is cornering Steel;
And though our one meeting was not very long,
She took the occasion to sing me this song:
"O, hush thee, my baby, the time soon will come
When thy sleep will be broken with hooting and
hum;
There are handles want turning and turning all
day,
And knobs to be pressed in the usual way;

O, hush thee, my baby, take rest while I croon,
For Progress comes early, and Freedom too soon."

SONGS OF EDUCATION:

IV. Citizenship

Form 8889512, *Sub-Section Q*

HOW slowly learns the child at school
The names of all the nobs that rule
From Ponsonby to Pennant;
Ere his bewildered mind find rest,
Knowing his host can be a Guest,
His landlord is a Tennant.

He knew not, at the age of three,
What Lord St. Leger next will be
Or what he was before;
A Primrose in the social swim
A Mr. Primrose is to him,
And he is nothing more.

But soon, about the age of ten,
He finds he is a Citizen,
And knows his way about;
Can pause within, or just beyond,
The line 'twixt Mond and Demi-Mond,
'Twixt Getting On—or Out.

The Citizen will take his share
(In every sense) as bull and bear;
Nor need this oral ditty
Invoke the philologic pen
To show you that a Citizen
Means Something in the City.

Thus gains he, with the virile gown,
The fasces and the civic crown,
The forum of the free;
Not more to Rome's high law allied
Is Devonport in all his pride
Or Lipton's self than he.

For he will learn, if he will try,
The deep interior truths whereby
We rule the Commonwealth;
What is the Food-Controller's fee
And whether the Health Ministry
Are in it for their health.

SONGS OF EDUCATION:

V. The Higher Mathematics

Form 339125, *Sub-Section M*

TWICE one is two,
Twice two is four,
But twice two is ninety-six if you know the way to score.
Half of two is one,
Half of four is two,
But half of four is forty per cent. if your name is Montagu:
For everything else is on the square
If done by the best quadratics;
And nothing is low in High Finance
Or the Higher Mathematics.

A straight line is straight
And a square mile is flat
But you learn in trigonometrics a trick worth two of that.
Two straight lines
Can't enclose a Space,
But they can enclose a Corner to support the Chosen Race:

For you never know what Dynamics do
With the lower truths of Statics;
And half of two is a touring car
In the Higher Mathematics.

There is a place apart
Beyond the solar ray,
Where parallel straight lines can meet in an unofficial way.
There is a room that holds
The examiner or his clerks,
Where you can square the circle or the man that gives the marks.
Where you hide in the cellar and then look down
On the poets that live in the attics;
For the whole of the house is upside down
In the Higher Mathematics.

SONGS OF EDUCATION:

VI. Hygiene

Form 394411102, *Sub-Section X*

"All practical Eugenists are agreed on the importance of sleep."—The Eugenic Congress.

WHEN Science taught mankind to breathe
A little while ago,
Only a wise and thoughtful few
Were really in the know:
Nor could the Youth his features wreathe,
Puffing from all the lungs beneath:
When Duty whispered softly "Breathe!"
The Youth would answer "Blow!"

When Science proved with lucid care
The need of Exercise,
Our thoughtless Youth was climbing trees
Or lightly blacking eyes:
To reckless idlers breaking bounds
For football or for hare-and-hounds,
Or fighting hard for fourteen rounds,
It came as a surprise.

But when she boldly counsels Sleep
To persons when in bed,
Then, then indeed men blush to see
The daybreak blushing red:
The early risers whom we term
Healthy, grow sickly and infirm;
The Early Bird who caught the Worm
Will catch the Germ instead.

For this at least be Science praised
If all the rest be rot,
That now she snubs the priggish child
That quits too soon his cot:
The pharisaic pachyderm
Of spiritual pride shall squirm:
The Early Bird catches the worm,
The Worm that dieth not.

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